

FEATURE ARTICLE: MESSAGE BOARD August 2009

## Being Stretched: are we up for what it takes? Pt. 1



I'm sure all of us have had conversations which, through an innocent remark, morphed into 'I wish I hadn't opened my mouth'. And when it is your responsibility to provide work performance feedback, an innocent, well-intentioned remark is the first casualty of perception. I speak of innocence in the sense that conversations around performance are opportunities to learn, and opportunities to be stretched. But are we up for it?

Take Calvin's intention to make a Christmas present for his parents. You might imagine his idea a beautiful example of childish creativity, despite having little relevance to them. Calvin is simply carried away with his good idea and the motivation to make it happen. But clearly, he is upset and indignant about his imaginary friend's observations. He is a little touchy isn't he? He is focused on his skills (his performance) as a sculptor rather than making a gift that his parents would actually appreciate. One thing is certain, Calvin isn't up for being stretched.

He is totally committed to his idea and his performance as a sculptor, blinded to Hobbes' innocent remarks. And in the real world, most of us can relate to that because we know how it feels to be so committed to **our** ideas and **our** performance that we perceive criticism where we ought to be seeing opportunities to learn and be stretched.

Let's be honest, most of us don't like to be told how to do our job. Despite (or perhaps because of) evidence that we are under-performing, the message (and sometimes the person delivering it) appears even more abrasive. Like Calvin, we are almost hard-wired to react badly to the gentle suggestion to 'try it this way'. And perhaps like Calvin our reaction is immediate and explosive, a sure sign of our attitude. No one likes being 'caught short' - and we can carry that attitudinal load around all our lives if we choose. Or we can change our minds about learning, learning from others and the nature of respect.

All of us have opportunities to see that our attitudes free or imprison us. **We own our attitudes.** But if we don't see that, our most probable future is determined by the degree to which we disrespect every opportunity to learn, stretch and grow.

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#### **How do we get beyond the lifelong conditioning of our attitudes?**

If we are asking that question, we are already on the journey towards **seeing** them. In seeing our attitudes, we come to appreciate **our own innocence**, and in turn, become **more ready to change our mind** about so many things that we previously held as unchangeable.

In life, we all change our attitudes many times - we learn, stretch ourselves and grow without knowing it or working at it. Our hidden attitudes, once they become visible to us, are a source of growth and a moment of possibility. Thankfully, there is something inside each of us that allows change to happen.

Morris Adler summarises it well *"The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies, continue growing as we continue to live."*

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## WE ARE WHAT WE DO

‘Jack, your welding joints are pretty good. Mine are just OK - could you give me a few tips to see what I could do to improve?’

‘Rosie remember you mentioned the time that I spend on the dispatch files? I'm wondering what I'm missing in the process that slows me down. Could you do a couple of them while I watch? I'd like to see what you do so that I can get them done quicker.’

Most of us can identify work areas that need to improve. We can also identify people around us that do a great job in the same or similar areas. The obvious action to take is to ask the best skilled person for assistance - yet why are we slow to do so? We see the benefits to getting the job done in a more effective way. We even see the benefits to our skill development and our long term prospects. Yet, we often don't take the obvious step...

Today is a new day. This moment is a new moment. We know that we can change our minds, even if our emotions fight against the desire to act differently. In the end it isn't about learning new skills, but learning new freedoms. Those inner 'skills' release us from our own self-created limitations.

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*Until next time... David*

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